

The Marquand Reader

November 29th, 2009.

The Marquand Reader is the weekly newsletter of the daily ecumenical worship program at Yale Divinity School. Please contact the dean of chapel with any comments or suggestions: siobhan.garrigan@yale.edu

In this week's issue:

Welcome to Advent!

La Fiesta de Guadalupe

Looking ahead to this week's services

Welcome to Advent

Happy New Year!

Today marks the first Sunday of Advent, the first day of the Christian new year. Unlike the first day of the calendar year, with its revelries and resolutions, the first day of the new liturgical year calls for attentiveness and a watchful stance. Indeed one of the readings traditionally associated with this day warns us specifically against dissipation and drunkenness (the pastimes of Jan 31st for many of us), for fear we would be inert when Christ comes in our midst. Instead, we are counseled to keep oil in our lamps and join the cosmos in attentively living in the in-between time in which we find ourselves: between rejoicing in the first coming of Christ and awaiting his second and final coming.

The season of Advent (which means “coming”) is one of the richest in texts, themes, prayers and symbols in the whole Christian year, yet it is condensed into just four short weeks. It is as if this distillation is itself encouraging us to stay awake, be alert, live in the moment, notice, don't miss it! Moreover, with only seven days left of classes and chapel services, our academic year forces us to engage Advent as fulsomely as possible. Next Tuesday night, after classes have finished, we will celebrate together the annual Advent Service at 7pm (more about that in next week's *Reader*), and in the days before then we will live into this Advent season in a variety of different ways, honoring a variety of Christian traditions.

The most obvious difference will be in the narthex, where our Advent wreath is positioned on the welcome table. Wreaths have been used in many ways throughout Christian history. As early as the seventh century, there is evidence of wreaths (or garlands of flowers) being used in baptismal, nuptial and funeral rites. The use of wreaths adorned by candles during the wintertime probably began as a ritual among pre-Christian Germanic peoples, who brought green branches inside their homes as a token of welcome to the spring to come and lit the candles to encourage the return of the light after it 'died' at the winter solstice. The same tradition was the antecedent of Christmas trees.

By the Middle Ages, Christians had adapted the candlelit wreath for their own practices during the Advent Season, as a material signification of their anticipation of Christ, the

light of the world, coming into the world and being born on Christmas Day.

Advent wreaths are composed of evergreens, symbolizing continuing and regenerative life. Four candles are placed in the wreath, and one candle is lit on each of the four Sundays in Advent. As for the candles themselves, ours are a plain cream color but in some traditions, three are purple and one is rose-colored, or in other traditions three are cream and one is purple. Purple, the liturgical color for penance was widely used during Advent because for many centuries Advent was understood as a penitential season; however, nowadays prayer and preparation – and not so much penance -- are understood to be the work of Advent.

Where there is a rose-colored candle, it is lit on the third Sunday of Advent (called *Gaudete* -- or Rejoicing -- Sunday), and it represents a time of celebration, because the Advent Season is more than halfway over and, therefore, Christ's coming is at hand. Also, the rose was a profound and popular image for Christ as part of (indeed unfurling from) the Holy Trinity from the early Middle Ages onwards, as can be seen reflected in a quick look through the Advent section of most hymnals.

Please feel free to light this week's candle and sit with the wreath during quiet times during the day – just please remember to blow the candle out before you leave.

La Fiesta de Guadalupe

Each year during Advent, the festival of Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated by many Christians (mostly, but not exclusively, those of Roman Catholic origin) throughout Latin America and on Thursday this week we will be led in celebration by YDL@.

The feast day of Guadalupe, which is celebrated on December 12th (but we don't have chapel then, so we're doing it this week), commemorates the stories surrounding the apparitions of *La Virgen Morena* to an indigenous farmer, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin at Tepeyac, a city a few miles north of the capital city of Mexico in the year 1531. These stories are understood to have played a vital part in the conversion of indigenous Americans to Christianity, because they offered various markers of both ancient and Christian theologies with which the people could identify in the image of this heavenly mother, who not only spoke the indigenous language but also looked like the indigenous people.

Former ISM/YDS professor Jaime Lara, when he participated in a service for this festival a few years ago commented as follows: "The most fascinating aspect of Guadalupe is that it introduces us to a more comprehensive and open-ended concept of God--a mestizo God. In [La Virgen], the Spanish and the Nuhautl concepts of God are beautifully combined to present us with an understanding of God that is fuller than either one of them had suspected."

"Through the Guadalupe event and story, those whom the builders of this world's empires had maligned and rejected, re-created the gospel at every level of human existence. The Guadalupe event was a divine intervention for the sake of the Gospel at the most unique moment in the recorded history of the Americas--the beginning of the New World.

"When today's poor experience themselves as recognized, respected, and called by name by the living God, they take on God's cause for humanity with the same joy and conviction as Juan Diego. [This] joy and fervor erupt when the faithful poor dare to defy the controlling and limiting rules and regulations of the dominant culture and its religious institutions and dare to converse directly with God in their own language and in the language of their ancestors. It is the joy of the poor who, far from giving in to despair, rejoice in recognizing the unique gifts God has bestowed upon them."

Look ahead to this week's services:

Monday 11/30

Just Fellowship -- *simply, a time of ecumenical Christian fellowship*

Tuesday 12/1

Carl Baer, graduating student preacher

Wednesday 12/2

Sung Morning Prayer – *the last of the John Tirro cycle*

Thursday 12/3

Fiesta de Guadalupe, led by YDL@

Friday 12/4

Holy Communion, led by Yale Black Seminarians